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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 001239

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/11/20

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SUBJECT: Argentina: President of the Chamber of Deputies Welcomes  
Ambassador, Describes Tense Social Dynamic in Jujuy Province

REF: A) BUENOS AIRES 1183; B) BUENOS AIRES 1179

CLASSIFIED BY: Vilma Martinez, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (SBU) Ambassador paid an introductory call on a warm and talkative Eduardo Fellner, President of Argentina's Chamber of Deputies, November 12. Fellner, a strong supporter of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK), speculated that the Lower House might consider political reform legislation before the end of the year, but that the Senate would certainly not be able to take it up before the new Congress began next March. Of the controversial political reform bill (ref A), Fellner said that the draft law itself was not problematic, but that the politics of its consideration were "difficult." Santa Fe province already had a political primary system along the lines advocated in the bill, he said, demonstrating that it was feasible. Fellner said he did not expect that there would be a special session of Congress during the three-month recess before the formal opening of Congress on March 1st.

¶2. (SBU) Speculating on the nature of the new Chamber of Deputies, Fellner noted that there were "many personalities" entering the new Congress, including former President Nestor Kirchner, his successful political rival in the Province of Buenos Aires, dissident Peronist Francisco de Narvaez, and the outspoken Civic Coalition leader Elisa Carrio to name a few. Fellner declined to speculate on leadership positions in the new Chamber of Deputies. (Note: Half of the Deputy positions were filled in June mid-term elections. The ruling FpV lost its majority, but as the largest minority in the Chamber, it is technically entitled to retain Fellner as Chamber President unless the other blocs join ranks and former a larger bloc, which does not appear likely.)

Jujuy and its Bolivian Base

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¶3. (C) In response to a question from the Ambassador about Milagro Sala, a piquetero leader in Fellner's home province of Jujuy, Fellner described the northern province's development and social challenges. Before his election in 1999, he suggested, the province had had little in the way of an economic development strategy. Despite his efforts, many in the province were still dependent on the state rather than the private economy.

¶4. (C) Fellner pointed out that 40 percent of Jujuy's population had Bolivian roots or ties, many of them recent immigrants with few resources. He described campaigning with then-presidential candidate Nestor Kirchner in 2003 (when Fellner was running for a second term) and complaining to Kirchner that the Argentine Ambassador to Bolivia had never visited. In response, he noted,

Kirchner had asked him to recommend the next Ambassador. Fellner selected Dr. Horacio Antonio Macedo, a lawyer who was serving as minister of production and previously as minister of economy. Fellner said he had worked to develop the province's ties to Bolivia, which he described as somewhat challenging under President Morales. (Fellner spoke fondly of former Bolivian President Carlos Mesa as an intelligent and well-intentioned leader.)

Jujuy's Piqueteros

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¶5. (C) Turning to Sala, Fellner described the significant resources dispensed to her Tupac Amaru organization (ref B). The piqueteros had used their national resources to create something like a second state, including health services and housing programs, rendering her a challenging figure to deal with. He said she was another of many Marxist-leaning leaders to emerge from Jujuy's disenfranchised population, though less radical than the notorious Carlos "Perro" Santillan. She "has done much good," and "we are going to see more of her," he concluded. (Note: Sala drew national attention when she allegedly led a violent disturbance against visiting Radical Party President Gerardo Morales in October, per ref B.)

Comment

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¶6. (C) Fellner was gracious and warm toward the Ambassador, encouraging her to continue the dialogue. His private commentary about Sala was particularly intriguing given the support to her movement from President Kirchner and Kirchner loyalists even after the incident with Senator Morales.

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